

**CLASSICS TO GO**  
**THE CRIME OF**  
**THE FRENCH CAFÉ**



**NICHOLAS CARTER**

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## **CHAPTER I.**

### **PRIVATE DINING-ROOM "B."**

There is a well-known French restaurant in the "Tenderloin" district which provides its patrons with small but elegantly appointed private dining-rooms.

The restaurant occupies a corner house; and, though its reputation is not strictly first-class in some respects, its cook is an artist, and its wine cellar as good as the best.

It has two entrances, and the one on the side street is not well lighted at night.

At half-past seven o'clock one evening Nick Carter was standing about fifty yards from this side door.

The detective had shadowed a man to a house on the side street, and was waiting for him to come out.

The case was a robbery of no great importance, but Nick had taken it to oblige a personal friend, who wished to have the business managed quietly. This affair would not be worth mentioning, except that it led Nick to one of the most peculiar and interesting criminal puzzles that he had ever come across in all his varied experience.

While Nick waited for his man he saw a closed carriage stop before the side door of the restaurant.

Almost immediately a waiter, bare-headed and wearing his white apron, came hurriedly out of the side door and got

into the carriage, which instantly moved away at a rapid rate.

This incident struck Nick as being very peculiar. The waiter had acted like a man who was running away.

As he crossed the sidewalk he glanced hastily from side to side, as if afraid of being seen, and perhaps stopped.

It looked as if the waiter might have robbed one of the restaurant's patrons, or possibly its proprietor. If Nick had had no business on his hands he would have followed that carriage.

As it happened, however, the man for whom the detective was watching appeared at that moment.

Nick was obliged to follow him, but he knew that he would not have to go far, for Chick was waiting on Sixth avenue, and it was in that direction that the thief turned.

So it happened that within ten minutes Nick was able to turn this case over to his famous assistant, and return to clear up the mystery of the queer incident which he had chanced to observe.

Nick would not have been surprised to find the restaurant in an uproar, but it was as quiet as usual. He entered by the side door, ascended a flight of stairs, and came to a sort of office with a desk and a register.

It was the custom of the place that guests should put down their names as in a hotel before being assigned to a private dining-room.

There was nobody in sight.

The hall led toward the front of the building, and there were three rooms on the side of it toward the street.

All the doors were open and the rooms were empty. Nick glanced into these rooms, and then turned toward the desk. As he did so he saw a waiter coming down the stairs from the floor above.

This man was known by the name of Gaspard. He was the head waiter, and was on duty in the lower hall.

"Ah, Gaspard," said Nick, "who's your waiter on this floor tonight?"

Gaspard looked at Nick anxiously. He did not, of course, know who the detective really was, but he remembered him as one who had assisted the police in a case in which that house had been concerned about two years before.

"Jean Corbut," replied Gaspard. "I hope nothing is wrong."

"That remains to be seen," said Nick. "What sort of a man is this Corbut?"

"A little man," answered Gaspard, "and very thin. He has long, black hair, and mustaches pointed like two needles."

"Have you sent him out for anything?"

"Oh, no; he is here."

"Where?"

"In one of the rooms at the front. We have parties in A and B."

"You go and find him," said Nick. "I want to see him right away."

Gaspard went to the front of the house. A hall branched off at right angles with that in which Nick was standing. On the second hall were three rooms, A, B and C.

Room C was next the avenue. The other two had windows on an open space between two wings of the building. Nick glanced at the register, and saw that "R.M. Clark and wife" had been assigned to room A, and "John Jones and wife" to room B. Room C was vacant.

The detective had barely time to note these entries on the book when Gaspard came running back.

His face was as white as paper, and his lips were working as if he were saying something, but not a sound came from them.

He was struck dumb with fright. Whatever it was that he had seen must have been horrible, to judge from the man's trembling limbs and distorted face.

Nick had seen people in that condition before, and he did not waste time trying to get any information out of Gaspard.

Instead, he seized the frightened fellow by the shoulder and pushed him along toward the front of the house.

Gaspard made a feeble resistance. Evidently he did not want to see again the sight which had so terrified him.

But he was powerless in Nick's grasp. In five seconds they stood before the open door of room B.

The door was open, and there was a bright glare of gas within.

It shone upon the table, where a rich repast lay untasted. It illumined the gaudy furnishings of the room and the costly pictures upon the walls.

It shone, too, upon a beautiful face, rigid and perfectly white, except for a horrible stain of black and red upon the temple.

The face was that of a woman of twenty-five years. She had very abundant hair of a light corn color, which clustered in little curls around her forehead, and was gathered behind in a great mass of plaited braids.

She reclined in a large easy-chair, in a natural attitude, but the pallid face, the fixed and glassy eyes, and the grim wound upon the temple announced, in unmistakable terms, the presence of death.

Nick drew a long breath and set his lips together firmly. He had felt that something was wrong in that house. The waiter who had run across the sidewalk and got into that carriage had borne a guilty secret with him, as the detective's experienced eye had instantly perceived.

But this was a good deal worse than Nick had expected. He had looked for a robbery, or, perhaps, a secret and bloody quarrel between two of the waiters, but not for a murder such as this.

One glance at the woman showed her to be elegant in dress and of a refined appearance.

She could have had nothing in common with the missing Corbut, unless, indeed, he was other than he seemed.

Certainly, whatever was Corbut's connection with the crime, there was another person, at least, as intimately concerned in it. And he, too, had fled.

Where was the man who had brought this woman to this house? How was it possible to account for his absence except by the conclusion that he was the murderer?

That was the first and most natural explanation. Whether it was the true one or not, the man must be found.

Nick turned to Gaspard. The head waiter had sunk down on a chair by the table and seemed prostrated.

From previous experience Nick knew Gaspard to be a man without nerve, and he was not surprised to find him prostrated by this sudden shock.

There was a bottle of champagne standing in ice beside the table. The detective opened it and made Gaspard drink a glass of the sparkling liquor.

It put a little heart into the man, and he was able to answer questions.

Nick, meanwhile, closed the door of the room. Apparently the tragedy was known only to Gaspard and himself and to the guilty authors of it.

"Did you see this woman when she came in?" asked Nick.

"No."

"Who showed her and the man with her to this room?"

"Corbut."

"Who waited on them?"

"Corbut."

"Who waited on the people in room A?"

"Corbut."

"They are gone, I suppose?"

"Yes; I looked in there before I came in here."

"Did you see any of these people?"

"I saw the two men."



"How did that happen?"

"One of them came out into the hall to call Corbut, who had not answered the bell quick enough."

"Which one was that?"

"The man in room A."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw the other man, later, coming out of room B."

"This room?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"Perfectly."

"Did he see you?"

"I think not. I was standing right at the corner of the two halls. The man came out and glanced around, but I stepped back quickly, because we do not like to appear to spy upon our guests. He did not see me."

"What did he do?"

"He went out the front way. I supposed the lady went with him, for I was sure that I heard the rustling of her dress."

"Where was Corbut then?"

"In room A."

"How long did he stay there?"

"Only a minute. I went back to the desk, and then was called by a waiter upstairs. Just as I turned to go I saw Corbut coming through the hall."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Yes; I called to him to stay by the desk while I went upstairs."

"Did he answer?"

"Yes; he said 'very well.'"

"And that's the last you saw of him?"

"Yes."

"All right; so much for Corbut. Now for the two men. Would you know them?"

"Not the man in room A. I didn't notice him particularly."

"But how about the man who came out of this room? He's the one we're after."

"I would know him," said Gaspard, slowly. "Yes; I feel sure that I could identify him."

"That's good. Now for the crime itself. Go back to the desk and ring for a messenger. When he comes, send him here. Don't let anybody else come, and don't say a word to anybody about this affair."

Gaspard, with a very pale face, went back to his desk.

Nick remained alone with the beautiful dead.

## **CHAPTER II.**

### **GASPARD SPOTS HIS MAN.**

A revolver lay on the carpet just where it would have been if it had dropped from the woman's right hand.

Its position suggested the possibility of suicide, and there was, at the first glance, nothing to contradict that theory, except the conduct of Corbut and the man who had registered as John Jones.

It might be that the woman had committed suicide, and the men had fled for fear of being implicated in the affair.

Nick examined this side of the case at once.

The pistol had evidently been held only a few inches from the woman's head when it was fired.

Her white flesh showed the marks of the powder.

The bullet had passed straight through the head.

The revolver carried a long thirty-two cartridge. Three of the five chambers were loaded.

One of them contained an empty shell, on which the hammer rested. The fatal bullet had doubtless come from this chamber, for the shell had been recently discharged.

In the fifth chamber was an old shell, which had apparently been carried under the hammer for safety, as is quite common.

The woman had a purse containing about twenty dollars, but no cards or other things which might lead to identification.

Her ears had been pierced for earrings, but she seemed not to have worn them recently. She had no watch.

There was one plain gold ring on the third finger of her right hand, and there was a deep mark showing that she had worn another, but that ring was gone.

How recently it had been removed was, of course, beyond discovery. There was no sign that it had been violently torn away.

When Nick had proceeded thus far with his investigation the messenger boy arrived. The detective sent messages to his assistants, Chick and Patsy.

He then notified a coroner, who came about ten o'clock and took charge of the body.

A minute examination failed to reveal any marks upon the clothing which might assist in establishing the woman's identity.

Nick then left the restaurant, taking Gaspard with him. Inspector Mclaughlin's men were by this time on hand, and they took charge of the house, under Nick's direction.

At seven o'clock in the morning Nick received a message from Patsy, who had been directed to find the cabman in whose cab Corbut had fled.

Patsy had located the cabman at his home on West Thirty-second street. The man's name was Harrigan.

Nick took Gaspard with him and went to the house where Harrigan boarded.

"I got on to him easy enough," said Patsy, whom they found outside the house. "I found the policeman who was on that beat last night, and got him to give me a list of all the night-

hawks he'd seen around there up to eight o'clock of the evening.

"Then I began to chase up the fellows on that list. The second man put me on to Harrigan. He remembered seeing him get the job, but couldn't tell what sort of a man hired him.

"I guess there's no doubt that he's the man, but I haven't questioned him yet. He's in there asleep."

Nick passed himself off as a friend of Harrigan's, and was directed with Patsy to the man's room.

They went in without being invited, after having tried in vain to get an answer to their pounding on his door.

The cabman was snoring in a heavy slumber.

"From what I heard," said Patsy, "Harrigan had a very large skate on last night. He's sleeping it off."

Nick shook the man unmercifully, and at last he sat up in bed.

"What t' 'ell?" said he, looking about him wildly. "Who are youse, an' wha's the row?"

As the quickest way to sober the man, Nick showed his shield. It acted like a cold shower-bath.

"Say, what was it I done?" gasped Harrigan. "S' help me, I dunno nothing about it. I had a load on me last night, an' I ain't responsible."

Patsy laughed.

"There's no charge against you," said Nick; "I only want to ask you a few questions."

Harrigan sank back on the pillow with a gasp of relief.

"Gimme that water-pitcher," he said; "me t'roat's full o' cobwebs."

He drank about a quart of water, and then declared himself ready for a cross-examination. Nick sized him up for a decent sort of fellow; and saw no reason to doubt that he was telling the truth when he answered the questions that were put to him.

It appeared that he had been on Seventh avenue, near the French restaurant, from a little after six to about half-past seven on the previous evening.

At the latter hour a man had engaged his cab. He had taken it to the side door of the restaurant, and the waiter had got in. The man who hired the cab was already inside.

He had driven them somewhere on Fifty-seventh street, or it might be Fifty-eighth. He couldn't remember exactly.

The two men got out together. He didn't know what had become of them.

His fare was paid all right. Then he had a couple more drinks, and the next thing he knew he was at the stable where he had hired the cab.

Of course he didn't confess this in so many words, but Nick understood the facts well enough.

That was absolutely all that Harrigan knew about the case.

"Would you recognize the man who hired your cab if you saw him again?" asked Nick.

"Oh, sure," said Harrigan. "I wasn't so very full. I had me wits about me. Say, you ain't going to do me dirt an' git me license taken away? I was all right. I didn't do any harm."

Nick assured Harrigan that if he acted right in this case his license would be safe, and then left the man to his slumbers.

"Not very promising, is it, my boy?" said Nick to Patsy, as they went downstairs. "We've lost the trail as soon as we struck it."

"Do you think he's giving it to us straight?"

"Yes; he doesn't know where he took the men nor what became of them after they left his cab."

"It's a pity he had such a jag. He'd have been the best witness in the case."

Nick smiled.

"If he hadn't been drunk he wouldn't have had anything to do with the case," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, it's clear enough. This man that we want saw Harrigan on that cab while the man was on his way to the restaurant with the woman. Then when it became necessary to get Corbut out of the way, he remembered the drunken cabman, and hired him."

"I don't see how you know that."

"A man would rather have a sober driver than a drunken one, wouldn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, the man who told you he saw Harrigan get the job was sober, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't the man take his cab? Because he wanted a drunken driver, who wouldn't be sharp enough to get on to any queer business.

"But he wouldn't have tried to find a drunken cabman just by luck, and he wouldn't have taken a sober one. Therefore he had seen Harrigan and hoped to find him in the same place.

"That's part of the plot. Now, then, you go to Chick, who's watching the body of the woman. I'm going to take Gaspard uptown and have a look at that part of the city where Harrigan left his passengers."

Nick and Gaspard went to the Thirty-third street station of the Sixth avenue elevated road.

They walked to the edge of the platform on the uptown end.

Suddenly Gaspard gave a violent start. He uttered an exclamation of surprise and pointed across the tracks.

"What is it?" cried Nick.

"The man who was in room B!" exclaimed Gaspard. "I am sure of it!"

At that instant a downtown train rushed into the station, cutting off Nick's view.

And a half-second later an uptown train pulled in on their side. Nick pushed open a gate before the train had fairly stopped. He dragged Gaspard after him.

The gateman tried to stop them, but Nick pushed the fellow in the car so violently that he sat down on the floor.

Then the detective pulled the other gate open, and, still dragging Gaspard, sprang down in the space between the tracks.



The other train was just starting. Nick leaped up and opened one of the gates.

Gaspard stood trembling. Excitement and terror rendered him incapable of action.

Nick reached down, and, seizing the man by the shoulders, lifted him up to the platform of the car as if he had been a child of ten.

"Look back," cried the detective, pushing Gaspard to the other side of the car. "Is your man still at the station?"

Two or three men were there, having, apparently, just missed the train.

It seemed possible that the criminal—if such he was—had seen Gaspard point, and had been shrewd enough not to board the car.

But Gaspard looked back and declared that his man was not there.

"Good," said Nick. "He must be on the train. We have him sure."

## **CHAPTER III.**

### **JOHN JONES.**

"I want you!" whispered Nick.

How many luckless criminals have been startled by those words! How many have seen the prison or the gallows rise before them at the sound!

In this case, however, the words seemed to produce less than the ordinary effect.

The man to whom they were addressed turned suddenly toward the detective, but did not shrink or tremble.

"I beg your pardon," said he; "I didn't quite understand what you said."

The man's coolness made Nick even more in doubt about Gaspard's identification.

After boarding the train they had walked through it hurriedly, and in the car next the engine Gaspard had clutched Nick's arm, whispering:

"There is your man!"

The person indicated was well-dressed, rather good-looking, and about thirty-five years old. There was nothing particularly striking about his appearance.

It would have been easy to have found dozens of such men on lower Broadway any day.

Nick feared a mistake. But Gaspard was sure.

"I never forget a face," he said. "That is the man whom I saw coming out of room B. That is the murderer."

The man was standing up and holding on to one of the straps. His profile was turned to them.

Nick waited until he turned and showed his full face. The detective was bound to give Gaspard every chance to change his mind.

But he remained firm, and at last Nick approached the accused and suddenly whispered the terrifying words in his ear.

Having done so, he was obliged to carry it through. Therefore, when the stranger asked Nick to repeat what he had said, the detective, in a low voice, inaudible to anybody else in the car, told him what the accusation was.

"This is ridiculous," said the man. "I read the story of this affair in the papers this morning, but I am not connected with it in any way. If you arrest me, you must be prepared to take the consequences."

"I guess we can manage the affair quietly," said Nick, "and give you no trouble at all. I suppose you were going downtown to business?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will go along, too, if you don't mind."

"By all means," said the man, and he looked much relieved.

"I understand what your duty is," he continued. "Since this imported French jackass has made this charge, of course you'll have to look into it. Come down to the office and make some inquiries, and then go up to my flat. I was at home last evening after eight o'clock.

"What did you do before that?"

"I had dinner with my wife, and then put her aboard a train. She's gone away on a visit."

"Where has she gone?"

"No, sir; none of that. I don't propose to have a detective go flying after her to scare her to death. She keeps out of this mess, if I have any say about it."

"But if you're arrested she'll hear about it and come back to the city."

"I'm not going to be arrested. You're too sensible a man to do such a thing. I can see that."

"Here we are. We get off at Franklin street. My place of business is just a little way up the street, toward Broadway."

They left the train. Nick was beginning to feel that a mistake had been made. This man's easy manner and perfect confidence were hard to square with the idea of his guilt.

"By the way," said the suspect, as they descended the stairs, "I forgot to give you my card."

He handed it to Nick as he spoke, and the detective read this:

MR. JOHN JONES.

ALLEN, MORSE & JONES,  
Electrical Fixtures,  
*The "Sunlight" Lamp.*

"What did I tell you!" exclaimed Gaspard, who was looking over Nick's shoulder. "It is the name that was on the register. He is the man."

But Nick took a different view. He was of the opinion that Mr. Jones had presented very strong evidence of his complete innocence.

Anybody else might have signed himself "John Jones," but the real John Jones, never!

It would be mighty hard to convince a jury that a man meditating murder had recorded his correct name for the benefit of the police.

The coincidence was certainly astonishing, but it was in Jones' favor.

They walked over to the office of Allen, Morse & Jones.

Mr. Allen was there.

"Good-morning, Mr. Allen," said Jones, "My name has got me into trouble again."

"How is that?"

"Did you read about that French restaurant murder last night?"

"Well, I glanced at the story in one of the papers."

"This Frenchman here is a waiter in the place. He saw me in an elevated train just now, and told this other man, who is a detective, that I was the party who took that woman to the restaurant.

"That was bad enough, but when they found out what my name was, they convicted me immediately. It appears that the visitor to the restaurant signed the very uncommon name of John Jones on the books."

"Why, what the devil!" exclaimed Allen, looking wrathfully at poor Gaspard, who was shaking in his shoes. "Don't you

know that this is a serious matter? What do you mean?"

"He is the man," cried Gaspard. "If I were dying, I would swear with my last breath that he is the man."

"But who's the woman?" asked Allen, turning to Nick. "And what has she to do with my partner?"

"That I cannot say," replied Nick; "she has not been identified."

"Then you have absolutely nothing to go upon except this fellow's word?"

"Nothing."

"Why, this is nonsense."

"Perhaps so," said Nick, "but you will admit that I would be false to my duty if I did not make an investigation."

"Investigate all you wish," laughed Jones. "But don't bother me any more than you have to. This is my busy day."

"I'm going right away," said Nick. "All I want of you is that you will give me your address, and meet me at your home in the latter part of the afternoon."

"Very well," said Jones, and he scribbled on a piece of paper. "I'll be there at half-past four o'clock."

Nick thanked Mr. Jones for his courtesy, and immediately withdrew. But he did not go far.

In a convenient doorway he wrote a note to Chick, on the back of the scrap of paper which Jones had given him, and sealed it in an envelope.

Then he sent Gaspard with it to Chick, who was on the lookout in the undertaker's room, where the body lay.